

TO: GOVERNOR MALLOY
FROM: CT HEROES PROJECT
RE: INTERIM PROGRESS REPORT ON ENDING HOMELESSNESS
AMONG VETERANS IN CONNECTICUT
AUGUST 15, 2014



The Connecticut Heroes Project (CTHP) and our partners believe – now more than ever – that our shared goal of ending Veteran homelessness in Connecticut by the end of 2015 is achievable. It is a profound opportunity to do right by our Veterans, and a chance for our state to achieve something extraordinary and unprecedented.

In April 2013, CTHP – together with the Partnership for Strong Communities and Connecticut’s plan to end homelessness, Opening Doors – brought together a wide range of government and not-for-profit partners committed to achieving this mission, in line with the VA’s federal goal. Together, in the past 16 months, **we have transformed Connecticut’s efforts to house our homeless Veterans:**

- There is an unprecedented level of cooperation and coordination among the key players working on this issue.
- For the first time, Connecticut has a comprehensive, actionable strategic plan jointly developed by state leaders and many other stakeholders throughout the state.
- Through greatly improved data collection and analysis, we have a much clearer picture of the magnitude and dimensions of the problem – and are able to track and measure our progress with high fidelity.
- A wide range of cutting-edge and innovative programs and initiatives have been designed, developed, launched, and implemented – and **are generating results.**
- Our work has already reduced Connecticut’s population of Veterans experiencing homelessness.
- Most importantly, the key players working on this issue every day are mobilized and deeply committed to achieving this vital objective.

In short, less than 17 months from our deadline, we know what must be done to achieve this goal – and we believe that it is within our grasp. However, it will take continued commitment and unity of effort from key partners and stakeholders, including those in state government who have committed to ensuring that we meet our goal.

The memo below outlines the top 10 initiatives that will get us to our goal – and estimates of the corresponding Veteran populations that these initiatives can impact. For each, we provide an account of what has been done to date and what must be done going forward. We have also included an appendix with our latest detailed analysis of Connecticut’s homeless Veteran population.

Together, we can achieve this goal.

1. IMPROVING OUTREACH

A range of initiatives to ensure that Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) and VA Connecticut (VA-CT) staff quickly reach all Veterans who need services.

	70 current pop.	350 through 2015
Using Data.		
Outreach Assignments.		
Outreach Training.		
Veterans Outreach Night.		
Engaging Mainstream Providers.		
Case Conferencing.		
Stand Down.		

Using Data. Outreach workers now receive a biweekly list of Veterans in CT homeless programs, and aggressively use the list to reach every Veteran in the system.

Outreach Assignments. CTHP has worked with the key agencies to delegate and reinforce outreach responsibilities, ensuring the entire state is covered.

Outreach Training. Organized by the Connecticut Coalition to end Homelessness (CCEH), CT’s first statewide Veterans outreach training took place in July, bringing together front-line staff to study cutting-edge outreach practices.

Veterans Outreach Night. CTHP, SSVF, VA-CT, CCEH, and the Department of Housing (DOH) have launched a monthly

Veterans Outreach Night, in which two dozen outreach workers visit a dozen shelters across the state to forge connections with shelter staff and engage new Veterans.

Engaging Mainstream Providers. CTHP, CCEH, and DOH are working directly with shelters and other mainstream providers to ensure they refer all Veterans to key services.

Case Conferencing. Teams of VA-CT and SSVF outreach workers meet monthly to create service plans for 30-40 Veterans who have been difficult to house.

Stand Down. For the first time, VA-CT and SSVF staff will be placed at the front door of the State VA’s annual Stand Down in September, assessing and serving all 1,000 Veteran attendees.

The Need: All of the above projects are on track. No further assistance is needed at this time.

2. REFORMING VA TRANSITIONAL HOUSING (“GPD” PROGRAMS)

CT has a huge amount of federal VA transitional housing, a model which in many cases needlessly delays Veterans’ recovery. We need to comprehensively reform these 17 programs with 180 beds.

160
current
pop. 400
through
2015

VA-CT clinicians are currently conferencing with Veterans and GPD staff around the state to determine **housing plans for all Veterans in GPD programs**, and to identify any gaps in services. The VA is also setting **new expectations** for GPDs, highlighting the need to move Veterans quickly to permanent housing, and to collaborate more closely with re-housing programs. These

interventions will allow VA to determine precise plans for the future of each GPD. As these service improvements decrease the GPD population statewide, **some facilities will be converted to permanent housing**. For those that remain, the **state’s employment program** for Veterans (described below) will be critical in effecting rapid transitions.

The Need: VA-CT staff are developing plans for each facility. Assistance may be needed to engage the GPDs — which are privately run — and secure their support. State leadership must also work with federal VA to ensure flexibility in GPD funding.

3. ROCKY HILL

Rocky Hill hosts the single largest population of homeless Veterans in Connecticut. We must act quickly to improve services for current residents and set the facility on a path to modernization.

100
current
pop. 150
through
2015

These initiatives should be undertaken in the next three months:

Comprehensive review committee. The Governor has appointed Lt. Governor Nancy Wyman to lead a comprehensive review process with the mission of fully optimizing the State Department of Veterans Affairs, and specifically the Rocky Hill campus.

Revision of key policies. As part of its work, the review committee should carefully assess existing policies at Rocky Hill, with an eye to their role in facilitating Veterans’ independence, as well as their impact on the neediest Veterans. The state should act on any resulting recommendations with alacrity.

HMIS Integration. Rocky Hill is putting its residential programs on the statewide HMIS homelessness database, which will allow us for the first time to determine the scope of their population.

Comprehensive Assessment and Inreach. SSVF has begun to serve Veterans staying at Rocky Hill. **A comprehensive SSVF-led assessment of Veterans at the facility, yielding housing plans for each Veteran, is a key next step.**

Case management. There is a critical need for additional case management for the Veterans at Rocky Hill. This component is essential to address the longer-term needs of these Veterans.

The Need: Additional support from state leaders could be critical to these initial projects’ success.

4. DISCHARGE PLANNING FOR JUSTICE-INVOLVED VETERANS

Increased coordination between DOC and VA-CT is leading to better outcomes for justice-involved Veterans, but more could be done to facilitate and speed up these key initiatives.

50
current
pop. 200
through
2015

DOC and VA-CT now meet regularly to discuss difficult Veteran cases, and have developed a protocol to ensure no Veteran exits prison to an emergency shelter. Soon, VA will begin conducting **group sessions** in prisons, to help Veterans plan for their discharge. However, it is not known exactly how many Veterans will be exiting prison homeless in the next two years, and thus it is very possible that existing resources are

Insufficient, especially for Veterans with sex offenses. **DOC must conduct a thorough assessment to determine the need;** DOH and VA can then identify and fill any gaps. Additionally, DOC and VA are interested in establishing a **Veteran wing** within a prison, where services can be concentrated for interested Veterans. Additional high-level support may be needed to make this a reality.

The Need: Support for the inmate needs assessment and the Veteran wing could speed these projects significantly. Additionally, housing will be needed for sex offenders and potentially other populations; support for these projects is vital.

5. ADDITIONAL RENTAL ASSISTANCE VOUCHERS

With careful targeting, a small additional subsidy could allow us to move all remaining chronically homeless Veterans into housing immediately.

50
current
pop. 60
through
2015

Improved inreach to GPDs, Rocky Hill, and DOC — and improved outreach overall — is identifying **more high-need Veterans who need permanent supportive housing to thrive**. Meanwhile, more than 200 Veterans in VA-CT’s high-intensity supportive housing program (HUD-VASH) have graduated from case management services and need only a rental subsidy. In

many cases, this subsidy is relatively low-cost. Through careful targeting, a small amount of state funding could remove 50 of those Veterans from the HUD-VASH voucher they no longer require, freeing up those deeper resources for other Veterans more in need.

The Need: CTHP and VA-CT are working to calculate the financial value of the needed subsidy. CTHP will determine these figures by late August. We may need high-level government support to ensure the vouchers are made available.

6. EMPLOYMENT SUPPORTS

The Governor's Veterans employment plan is a key ingredient in reforming GPDs and promoting independence for Veterans in supportive housing.

N/A
pop. estimates

The Veterans Opportunity Pilot is a set of employment initiatives funded in Gov. Malloy's 2015 budget to boost independence for Veterans in recovery. The plan will speed graduations from transitional and supportive housing, freeing up resources for other Veterans, and will assist in homelessness prevention and rapid re-housing. The plan has three elements:

New IPS employment specialists. The funds should be used to hire as many new employment specialists as possible, trained in the research-proven IPS model and dedicated to helping Veterans in HUD-VASH and GPDs find work. It is imperative that these staff are hired as soon as possible.

Coordination of employment services. A Veteran Employment Coordinator position is intended to make connections between Veterans in need and dozens of staff working on Veterans employment across the state — sharing best practices and ensuring that all Veterans interested in work receive services.

CT Heroes Business Network. A growing group of businesses — many Veteran-owned — is committing to hire homeless and at-risk Veterans, preventing or ending their homelessness. The Coordinator would oversee and grow this Network.

The Need: The Pilot should be implemented as soon as possible, with maximum fidelity to the model outlined here.

7. STREAMLINING THE VA HOUSING PROCESS

Moving chronically homeless Veterans into VA supportive housing must be as short and simple a process as possible.

60
current
pop. 160
through
2015

Moving chronically homeless Veterans into permanent supportive housing with the HUD-VASH program can take more than 4 months in Connecticut, compared to 30 days in leading communities nationwide. During those additional months,

Veterans remain chronically homeless, using up other resources, and sometimes lose interest in the process entirely. CTHP has consulted with VA to develop a faster timeline, and VA recently launched a [campaign to bring lease-up down to six weeks](#).

The Need: Though this project is behind schedule, no further intervention is needed at this time.

8. STREAMLINING THE SSVF HOUSING PROCESS

Moving homeless Veterans into housing with SSVF rapid re-housing services must be as short and simple a process as possible — typically under 30 days.

15
current
pop. 150
through
2015

SSVF Coordination and Best Practices. Through monthly meetings of the state's SSVF programs and targeted follow-up, SSVF grantees (with CTHP support) are examining their services, sharing best practices on housing and income building, and limiting bureaucratic delays, speeding the housing process.

Landlord Engagement and Training. In cooperation with

CTHP, DOH is sponsoring the state's first landlord forum dedicated to Veterans programs this fall. The event will outline best practices for private landlords to help house Veterans.

Case Conferencing. As described above, SSVF and VA-CT case workers meet regularly to discuss difficult cases, designing streamlined outreach and housing plans for those Veterans.

The Need: Project is on track. No further intervention is needed at this time.

9. HUD-VASH INDEPENDENCE INITIATIVE

By boosting independence for Veterans in supportive housing, we can speed graduations, freeing up resources for other Veterans in need, and preventing returns to homelessness.

N/A
current
pop. 60
through
2015

CTHP and VA-CT have designed a multi-part plan to support HUD-VASH Veterans in increasing their independence:

Building social independence. Support groups for program alumni and a new statewide companionship program are helping Veterans build networks outside the VA system of care.

Building financial independence. Money management

workshops, dedicated supported employment staff, and an innovative lending circles program will help Veterans build the economic standing they need to achieve independence.

Culture change. HUD-VASH is currently in the midst of a 100-day campaign to engage with Veterans about transitioning to full independence. The program's literature has also been redesigned with a focus on independence.

The Need: No further intervention is needed at this time.

10. DATA IMPROVEMENTS

CTHP and CCEH are working together to ensure our data systems allow us to track this issue.

N/A
pop. estimates

Expanding reach of HMIS data. In recent months, dozens of providers have been added to the regular Veterans data report. The remaining Veterans providers — including VA-CT, Rocky Hill, and several transitional programs — will come online soon.

Additional analysis. CTHP's analysis of HMIS data has yielded clear guidance about focus areas in our overall campaign, as well

as identifying individual Veterans who have slipped through the cracks. CTHP will continue to pinpoint areas where existing services are inadequate to achieve our mission.

Cleaning HMIS data. By working closely with providers, CTHP has been able to remove inaccurate entries from the HMIS data, providing clean estimates of need and clear guides to outreach.

The Need: Project is on track. No further intervention is needed at this time.

APPENDIX: DATA ANALYSIS

Population / Problem	Population Size		Needs
	Monthly	Annual	
A. No further action needed			
Rapidly re-housed: Receive SSVF and are housed in 30 days.	14	104	N/A
Independent exits: Exit shelter quickly without housing assistance.	12	142	N/A
B. Further action needed			
Services too slow: Receive SSVF or rapid VA services but remain homeless more than 30 days.	13	43	Outreach: Improving outreach efforts to quickly engage Veterans. Streamlined housing process — SSVF: Sharing best practices, case conferencing, and engaging landlords to speed up housing.
Unknown Veterans: At least 2 weeks in shelter without contact by VA or SSVF. (CTHP is still working to determine the status and needs of this population.)	27	124	Outreach: Improving outreach efforts to quickly reach all Veterans. Justice-involved Veterans: For some Veterans, resources and supports during re-entry are key.
Difficult to serve: Bouncing between different programs, and/or resisting engagement.	31	81	Case conferencing: Staff meetings to plan and improve services for difficult cases. Streamlined housing process: Sharing best practices, engaging landlords, and case conferencing to speed up housing. Also, a concerted campaign to break through barriers in VA supportive housing. Justice-involved Veterans: For some Veterans, resources and supports during re-entry are key.
Too long in transitional housing: Lengths of stay are too high for most Veterans at VA transitional programs.	160*	340*	GPD Reform: Programmatic changes to promote faster, more successful program exits. Employment: The state’s Veterans Opportunity Pilot will promote independence.
Too long at Rocky Hill: Lengths of stay are too high for most Veterans at the Rocky Hill State Veterans Home.	100*	150*	Rocky Hill Reform: Connecting Veterans at Rocky Hill to permanent housing resources.
Total	357	984	

CTHP's analysis, based on data from the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). Individuals are identified as Veterans based on self-report, although individuals reported to be ineligible or non-Veterans based on service provider engagement are excluded (24 monthly; 69 annual). Data is current as of June 2014. Data includes all Veterans who are reached by shelter, transitional housing, SSVF, VA, or Rocky Hill. While there may be some Veterans experiencing homelessness eluding all of those services, we assume this figure is quite small.

* Estimated figures, pending HMIS integration. Transitional housing figures also include a relatively small group of Veterans in non-VA funded transitional beds.

These statistics reflect the most precise analysis Connecticut has seen regarding Veteran homelessness. Thanks to efforts by CCEH and CTHP, increasing numbers of agencies are included in these statistics; by the end of the summer, all agencies that interact with homeless Veterans will be included. Feedback from key providers has helped us clean the data, removing non-Veterans and Veterans no longer experiencing homelessness. Finally, by looking at months of HMIS data, CTHP has been able to classify Veterans by their level of need and their interactions with the service system.